

# Holyoke Food and Equity Collective's

## 2024 Impact Report

### Overview

2024 was a really big year for us, with several new projects. We started growing food to donate and started hosting the Collective Dinners series. We also started our first Community Compost Hub. We continued building garden beds, selling seedling shares and we distributed a record number of bucket planters. Imminent HIP changes got us involved in policy work again. We saw a huge surge in diaper demand and distributed 33% more than in 2023. Having a consistent part time employee helped with project management and community engagement. We worked with 114 total volunteers.

### Projects

**Free food-producing gardens for Holyoke residents: 4'x8' garden beds and bucket planters**

With over **100** responses to our 2024 garden bed and bucket application, we were able to fulfill **13%** of the garden bed requests and **58%** of the bucket planter requests with our available supplies. Recipients were chosen based on need. Over half of the bucket recipients were BIPOC, claimed food insecurity and/or were on SNAP benefits. All of the garden bed recipients were Latinx and were either on SNAP or had trouble accessing or affording food. We built **11** free raised garden beds with soil for **6** households with **24** volunteers. We gave away **97** food-producing bucket planters to **33** families.

**Diaper Bank**

We distributed diapers twice a month to over **100** families, for a total of over **30,000** diapers (up 10,000 from 2023)! We hosted 6 diaper packing parties that engaged **50** volunteers. In November and December we did a diaper fundraising campaign that gained us **\$510** in new recurring monthly donations specifically for buying diapers. Some issues with our distribution system being taken advantage of by recipients caused us to buy an ipad and begin collecting recipients names and childrens' birth dates. We are now tracking all diapers distributed on the ipad with the recipient's "member number". This has been a huge improvement to our system, and now that we have better data, we can plan ahead better for diaper purchasing and packing parties. We moved to a new donated storage space in November that is working well.

<p><b>Collective Dinners</b></p>	<p>Our Harvest dinner the week before Thanksgiving kicked off a new quarterly series of seasonal sliding-scale Collective Dinners at Lighthouse Holyoke/De la luz Soundstage. With around <b>110</b> in attendance, bison, duck and turkey were feasted on, along with indigenous grown wild rice, tepary beans, and many vegetable dishes with donated local produce. Joyce White Deer Vincent told an interactive story and we played trivia with a combination of Holyoke, indigenous and food related questions. The kids activity area had games, toys, coloring and donuts on a string. Lighthouse students helped set up the room, do sound, and make the special acorn and corn flour cookies. <b>22</b> volunteers helped with cooking, event flow and cleanup. With a sliding scale starting at \$0, anyone could attend the dinner.</p>
<p><b>Holyoke Seedling CSA</b></p>	<p>We worked with Windy Ridge Organics to provide the opportunity for Holyoke residents to purchase vegetable and herb seedlings for their gardens with SNAP and HIP. Each seedling share was 31 assorted plants for \$40. We sold <b>24</b> shares, <b>10</b> of which were purchased with HIP.</p>
<p><b>Gleaning</b></p>	<p>We worked with <b>1</b> volunteer to rescue an estimated <b>2,400 lbs.</b> of surplus food from Stone Soup Farm and donate it to Kate's Kitchen. We also grew <b>450 lbs.</b> of melons, potatoes, squash and herbs at Eric Toensmeier's farm, which we gave to the Nipmuc and Kate's Kitchen. Western Mass SURJ helped out with the ground prep and planting with <b>12</b> volunteers.</p>
<p><b>Community Compost Hub</b></p>	<p>In September we built and launched the Community Compost Hub at Neighbor 2 Neighbor's Dwight Street Garden. This hub is a pilot and hopefully the first of several strategically placed compost hubs around the city. It is a solidly built 3-bin system, which anyone can bring food scraps to for free after a brief online training and signup. The hub already has <b>17</b> members and has diverted more than <b>350 lbs.</b> of food scraps from the landfill. The <b>6</b> volunteers that helped build the bin were teenagers from Rachel's Table's youth program.</p>
<p><b>Policy</b></p>	<p>In September we worked with the Holyoke Farmers' Market to host Senator John Velis and State Representative Pat Duffy at the market to talk to farmers and customers about the HIP program, and why it should remain fully funded. Both Velis and Duffy enjoyed the visit and were 100% on board.</p>



Marielis Perez and her girls help build garden beds in their backyard in the flats in June



Community Compost Hub info session and grand opening at Dwight Street Garden on Sept. 22



Senator John Velis and State Rep Pat Duffy visit the Holyoke Farmers' Market to talk about HIP

# Analysis

## Successes, Challenges and Growth

Some of our strongest and most consistent projects - the diaper bank, the seedling share and the garden beds and buckets all grew this year. The demand for diapers really surged and we gave away 33% more than in 2023. The seedling shares sold through Windy Ridge's website were 20 in 2023 and 24 in 2024, an increase of 17%. (The 2023 annual report says we sold 70 seedling shares because another organization also bought 50 of them). We built 90% more garden beds than the previous year (11 compared to 1), and gave away 59% more bucket planters (97 compared to 40).

This was a transition year for gleaning. Since other organizations in our area are now doing a lot of really great gleaning, and have more apt equipment than we do, we are figuring out what our role in gleaning is in this area. We did have a volunteer rescuing food from Stone Soup Farm once a week, but our gleaning was down by about 90% from the previous year. The addition of growing food and hosting Collective dinners are two ways we are starting to find new ways to facilitate food sovereignty rather than either duplicating or competing with the work of other organizations.

This was an exciting year for starting new projects. The Community Compost Hub and the Collective Dinners have already proven successful and we are excited for more of them to come.

## Goals for 2025

- **Increase grant intake to maintain capacity via paid administrative staff**
- **Build more compost hubs**
- **Increase relationships with other local organizations**
- **Increase the number of bucket gardens distributed and the number of households served with the food-producing gardens (including raised beds).**
- **Increase the number of seedling shares sold, and fundraise for the \$20 so they can be bought with HIP**
- **Time the garden beds earlier so that the seedling shares can be planted in beds**
- **Continue finding our niche with gleaning or find an apt replacement for gleaning**
- **Continue distributing diapers twice a month, and continue improving our tracking and inventory systems**
- **Host one Collective Dinner per season, each with a seasonal theme**
- **Do more policy work**
- **Revisit and discuss our collective structure and recruit more co-directors from the community we serve (Latinx and Puerto Rican from Holyoke)**



Bucket planters waiting to be picked up or delivered. Each recipient got 3 buckets.



Along with Western Mass SURJ, we grew melons and herbs in a donated greenhouse space to give away



Volunteers pack diapers in our new donated storage space



Community members dining at our Nov. 20 Harvest Dinner, the first of our Collective Dinner series



Kate's Kitchen was happy to take the leftovers from the Harvest Dinner